



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

March 29, 2005

News Release

MULTI-AGENCY GANG CRACKDOWN LEADS TO 38 ARRESTS

Joint ICE – North County Regional Gang Task Force Effort Targets Violent Oceanside Street Gang

SAN DIEGO – A total of 38 foreign nationals with suspected ties to a violent Oceanside street gang were arrested this morning in a joint operation involving more than 100 officers, including agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and members of the North County Regional Gang Task Force.

Of the 38 subjects taken into custody, 13 are reputed gang members. The remaining targets are associates of suspected gang members. The group, made up of 33 men and 5 women, are all Mexican nationals.

Today's crackdown targeted a notorious Oceanside street gang whose ranks are believed to number more than 100. It is suspected that as many as 20 percent of its members are foreign nationals who are in the country illegally. The gang's members are known to carry illegal weapons and have been linked to a wide range of criminal activities, including selling drugs on the street.

"Street gangs are a breeding ground for crime," said Michael Unzueta, San Diego special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations. "ICE is committed to using its broad immigration and customs authorities – both criminal and administrative – against gang members. We are working closely with our law enforcement partners to break up these deeply entrenched organizations that threaten public safety in our communities."

Many of those targeted in today's takedown are accused of, or have already been convicted for, a wide variety of crimes, including child molestation, murder, assault with a weapon, drug violations, robbery, burglary, domestic violence, and state parole violations.

Most of those taken into custody were located at their homes or at the homes of their associates in the Oceanside area. One man was booked into Vista County jail on charges related to domestic violence.

As part of this morning's enforcement effort, ICE Detention and Removal operations established a mobile transportation center at the old Oceanside Police Department where suspects were initially taken and detained. Officers from the Oceanside Police Department, San Diego Sheriff's Department, and the San Diego District Attorney's Office assisted in the operation.

In San Diego, ICE's anti-gang enforcement effort is led by a team of investigators who locate foreign national gang members who are subject to deportation based on their criminal convictions. In the last five months, ICE agents here have arrested more than 170 criminal aliens, including 71 gang members. In fiscal year 2004 (October 2003 through September 2004), ICE agents in San Diego arrested more than 500 criminal aliens, including more than 100 gang members and their associates. ICE deportation officers, working in tandem with investigators, have removed most of these aliens from the country.

In January 2005, ICE launched Operation Community Shield, a national law enforcement anti-gang initiative that brings all of ICE's law enforcement powers to bear in the fight against the Mara Salvatrucha gang organization – better known as MS-13, the most violent and rapidly growing street gang.

Last month, ICE announced the arrest of 103 MS-13 gang members on a range of criminal and/or administrative charges.

#ICE#

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.